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Work and Workers.

THE PROGRESS OF BIBLICAL THOUGHT IN SCOTLAND.

A movement was set on foot in the United Free Church of Scotland last October to secure the removal of Professor George Adam Smith, D.D., from his chair in the Free Church College, Glasgow, because of the critical views concerning early Hebrew history which he presented in his recent work on *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*. A committee was appointed to consider the matter, and to make a recommendation concerning it to the General Assembly, which met last May. The committee reported, through Dr. James Kidd, that in their opinion it was inadvisable for the Assembly to proceed against Professor Smith. A motion was therefore made by Principal Robert Rainy of the New College, Edinburgh, to the Assembly as follows:

That the Assembly receive the report and adopt the recommendation with which it closes, that it is not the duty of the church to institute any process against Professor G. A. Smith, in connection with his lectures recently published. At the same time the Assembly declares that it is not to be held as accepting or authorizing the critical theories therein set forth. In dealing with the subject of this report, the Assembly desires to give expression to the unabated reverence cherished in this church for the written Word, as the lively oracles through which the voice of God reaches his children, for teaching, for comfort, and for admonition; and it declares its unwavering acceptance of the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and life. And while the Assembly does not feel called upon to interfere with serious discussion of questions now raised,



PROFESSOR GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

unless the interests of Christian truth should plainly seem to require it, the Assembly calls upon ministers and professors who may take part in such discussions, to take care that reverence for Holy Scripture should be conspicuously manifest in their writings, and to treat, with the consideration that is so plainly due, views hitherto associated in the minds of our people with the believing use of the Bible. Finally, the Assembly recognizes that the discussions in regard to the origin and history of biblical books, which for a number of years have exercised the minds of learned men, have tended to create perplexity and anxiety for many Christian people; yet, recalling the results of former discussions, the Assembly earnestly exhorts its people not to be soon shaken in mind by what they hear of statements regarding the Bible or regarding some parts of its contents. These will in due time be weighed, adjusted, and put in their proper place. Above all the fluctuations of human opinion the Lord rules and overrules, and his Word abides; "the grass withereth, the flower thereof fadeth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever."

This motion prevailed in the Assembly by a vote of 534 to 263, a majority of 271. By this decisive vote in favor of biblical scholarship and the historical investigation of the Bible the Assembly has reversed its previous attitude of hostility as manifested in the action against Professor W. Robertson Smith in 1881, when the Assembly deposed him from his chair of Hebrew in the Free Church College at Aberdeen because his views of Old Testament history were pronounced heretical. Between the years 1881 and 1902 have intervened twenty-one years of progress; the younger generation of ministers has been trained to think and to investigate. Consequently there have arisen a larger view of the Bible and a better spirit in the Assembly. This condition in Scotland, made so clear by the recent action, is indicative of the condition in America, England, Germany, and even to some extent in France. The change has been effected from an inert traditionalism to a thorough historical study of the Bible and of Christianity, from a condemnation of biblical scholars to a recognition of their importance.

Principal Rainy's address before the Assembly, in support of his motion, was an admirable presentation of the proper attitude which the people should assume toward the work of the biblical scholars. He said that the one thing he was really anxious for was that their proceedings should embody a worthy attitude of the church toward this whole subject; at the same time, he would not wish the action of the Assembly to be construed as meaning that they gave a general license to critics to say whatever they pleased. He pointed out that in his motion they had distinctly reserved to the church the right to inter-

pose when they thought serious elements of the Christian faith required it; and that in such circumstances, and especially if they found men wantonly making near approaches to the center of the citadel that struck them as of a dangerous kind, they would not be slack, he hoped, to consider how that state of things should be met. But, while that was so, he had endeavored to show the reasons for taking care at this stage to take no position which would involve them in a false relation to the processes of thought and to the whole current of opinion as it was forming itself among men whose business it was to examine and to criticise ancient books, and particularly this most sacred Book of all. His anxiety about these facts, in the first place, was that they should not rashly be admitted to be facts; and, in the second place, that where the evidence was produced, and was growing, there should be no attempt to stifle the evidence or to stop the process by authority. His anxiety about that was just this, that he knew it had pleased God to order His revelation all along upon the plane of history, and upon the plane of historical event; and he felt that, while he hoped that he knew something of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he did not emancipate himself from the obligation to take along with that the facts of history, and new facts if they were discovered. His very faith in the Scripture was that he knew, if pains enough were taken to make sure that the facts were facts, they could not be contrary to the Word of God, and might help him to some further understanding of what God aimed at and intended in those Scriptures of his.

It was a mistake to suppose that, when anyone was led to take a view of some passage of Holy Scripture which had not been usual, it was therein implied that this passage was removed for the future from its former place in the revelation of God, as a part of the great mass of documents by which the voice of God reaches the hearts of men. It appeared to him that if this discussion was to be usefully carried on—he meant the discussion of the rights and wrongs of the critical theories and position—it must be carried on by meeting the critical argument upon the merits. When Christian scholars come to take up responsibilities on this subject and to deal with these investigations, it is not in their own choice to settle beforehand the conclusions which they are to embrace at the end. So far as it is a question of facts and of the evidence which establishes the facts, the man who does that is bound, if he is to express his opinion, to say that his mind is open to all evidence, though he is bound at the same time to sift it very carefully. Men may have their own right and their own reasons for resist-

ing these tendencies, whether on the part of unbelieving and naturalistic scholars, or on the part of believing men. They may have the right to resist on the evidence of the facts, or more likely on the processes of reasoning, based upon the facts and leading to conclusions, the successive steps to inferences by which theories that appeared to them unreasonable and dangerously sweeping had been reached. No opinions of other men could compel them to the adoption of them. But it is true that the tide of opinion as to what the facts implied began to raise questions that have to be dealt with by discussion of the evidence of facts, and not in any other way. If the facts turn out to be facts, the discovery to them may very likely involve pain; but if the facts are facts, the ascertainment of them is pure gain, so far as they are facts, to everybody. He believed—at least he thought it very likely—that there would be facts to be recognized, and consequences of the facts that would require to be admitted into their minds. But, however that might be, whether it was likely or not, what he was putting to the Assembly was that there were allegations or facts which had acquired a position that required them and himself to be patient with discussion. They could not settle them, he could not settle them; discussion must settle them, and nothing else could do it.

Professor James Orr, of the United Free Church College, Glasgow, and a colleague of Professor G. A. Smith's in that institution, seconded and spoke for Principal Rainy's motion. He said that the question really before them was not so much the merits of Professor Smith's book as the attitude which the church was to assume toward that modern critical movement as a whole. There was no disguising the fact that, for good or for evil—and he believed, in the providence of God, immensely more for the good than for the evil in its issue—that criticism was with them, and they must face the fact. The Assembly was not making a situation. It was facing a situation which already existed. It was confronted with a movement of long growth, widely spread, and ranging on its side, with varying degrees of acceptance—explain it how they might—the bulk of Old Testament scholarship, deeply penetrating the thought and literature of the country and of the church. He did not say that the church had not a responsibility in regard to this movement. It was futile to attempt to deal with a movement of this character and magnitude and to dispose of it by any vote or decision of an Assembly committee. No one was in a position to draw a line, and say that exactly at that point legitimate inquiry or discussion stopped; and it passed his comprehension how anyone who knew

what this critical movement meant should dream of asking any committee of the Assembly to discriminate in detail between the truth and the error in the large and difficult questions involved in this discussion. What was the object which Professor Smith in this volume set before him? Was it not, in opposition to naturalistic theories, precisely this, that Israel's religion could not be explained out of any mere natural factors, that it could only be accounted for by a positive divine revelation, by the actual revelation of the one true and living God by word and deed in Israel? Again and again, in so many words, that was expressly declared. The view of Professor Smith's critics was that his book destroyed belief in the revealed origin of the religion of Israel. In point of fact, whether they thought the Professor's argument a good one or not, Professor Smith was seeking a basis from which to demonstrate more securely the reality of that revelation.

Those who assailed Professor Smith accused him in the strongest measure of subverting the authority and denying the inspiration of the Old Testament. But he thought it must be seen by every candid reader of his book that Professor Smith did not regard himself as doing any of those things. He could not conceive how anyone could give stronger or more eloquent expression to his sense of the abiding value of the Old Testament for the life and doctrine of the church, or more emphatically declare that Christ's estimate of the Old Testament must always be the estimate of the Christian, than Professor Smith had done in his book. The question was not so much whether there was inspiration in the Old Testament, as precisely what was held to be covered by the Bible's assertion of its own inspiration. And here Christian men, in point of fact, did differ, and had always to some extent differed. But surely he was not wrong in saying that the essence of the matter is conserved when we hold the reality of God's historical revelation, in word and deed in Israel, leading up to Christ; and our possession of a record which, in every essential respect, preserves and conveys the meaning of the message of that revelation to us. Given such an inspiration as infallibly fitted the Bible for its great purpose of making us wise unto salvation that was in Christ Jesus, and of equipping the man of God perfectly for all the ends of his spiritual life, had we not everything secured that was demanded by the Bible's own tests of inspiration?

He who has real confidence of the firmness of the ground on which he stands will not be readily thrown into panic by the blowing of trumpets of adversaries. He will possess his soul in patience and make

good the truth of the old word: "He that believeth shall not make haste." Whatever they may think of Professor Smith's speculations, there could be but one opinion among them, that he at least had nobly proved in the past his faith, his zeal, and his evangelical fidelity, by works that had made his name a household word and an honor; that he had preached a living gospel, and had been made instrumental, as few were, by tongue of fire and vivid imagination and prophetic fervor, to kindle faith and move to godliness in an age far lost to prophetic ideals. Rather than accentuate by continued controversy and new committees the points in which they might unhappily differ, he would say, let them unite in thanking God for the gift he had given to them in Professor Smith, and for the work he had been enabled to accomplish for God's glory.

Among the other addresses which were made in support of the motion for dismissing the matter, Rev. John Kelman, of Edinburgh, said that it was not a question between revelation and attacking revelation. The question was between two methods of revelation. That was a vital distinction, and it seemed to him the thing which came to them in this view, that had caused so much anxiety, that had given so many fears, and that was still upon its trial here, was that, while all through this view of revelation the living God is speaking to his people, and through them to all the earth, yet the revelation, the words by which he speaks, and the methods he takes of revealing himself, were keeping pace in this view with the slow progress of men through the early ages. That seemed to him the point of view of the book, which was really the critical matter before them. As to Dr. Smith's view of revelation, he thought they must remember that he had enriched this church, and many other churches, with other books besides the one now being discussed, and in these books there would be no difficulty in finding many a passage in which it could be seen plainly how loyal he was to a belief in revelation. Only he believed in a revelation which kept pace with man's slow progress from the crude beginnings of national life until it finally confronted him with Jesus Christ. He did not think they realized how very widespread a matter this new method was. It was not a local *Zeitgeist*. It was not a Scottish affair — it was a matter which was exercising great and able minds throughout the world; and it seemed very serious if in the midst of this movement, which was going on in all the churches of Christendom, one church checked discussion. The church which did that at such a time would sever itself from the whole trend of theological thought. To

some of them this subject came very nearly, and it was his own experience for the last years that had forced him to speak at this time. His work had led him among not a few, but among hundreds, of doubting young men and women of our time. He thought he knew something of the issues there. People talked about them as if there might be eccentric intellectual cowards here and there scattered over the land ; but there was a very real checking of faith in many quarters where, it might be, some of them had not realized it, but some of them had. To many faith was supremely difficult in an age like the present one. And for the sake of these people he earnestly pleaded that these difficulties, which, after all, were matters of detail, should not be settled by any great decision upon a matter like this. The greater issues of faith were being obscured from many of their people by little difficulties of detail in regard to the interpretation of the method of revelation. They could not see the wide field of Christ and of Christ's love because of certain difficulties. These might be trifling in themselves, but still they stood between the people and the broader field which they longed for—a revelation of God to themselves. In their hearts they longed to be sure of God, and there were many who were not sure of him today who wanted to be ; and this method of revelation—this way of looking at the whole subject—was one along which many of them would find God, and had found God ; and it was because of that he pleaded for liberty. Would the Assembly foreclose this great question, and make the situation an absolutely impossible one for them ? All he asked was that as ministers they should be allowed to do their work in a situation whose difficulty no man could know until he had heard some of those voices of the seekers after truth that were so frequent among them.